

THE DISCURSIVE MANAGEMENT OF IDENTITY IN INTERVIEWS WITH FEMALE FORMER COLONIALS OF THE BELGIAN CONGO: SCRUTINIZING THE ROLE OF THE INTERVIEWER

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Abstract

Whilst interviews are often regarded as an essential tool for social science, it has long been recognized that the interviewer has a formative role in the locally situated socio-communicative events that interviews are. Using transcripts of interviews elicited from female former colonials in the Belgian Congo, this article examines the way in which the interviewer, himself a former colonial, manages the construction of meaning and identity in relation to two intricately interwoven issues, namely the position of women and colonial society more generally. Findings demonstrate that the interviewer places the interviewees in a position of interactional subordination which also allows him, despite the threat to the interviewees' face, to construct women as being superfluous both in 1950s-society in general and more specifically in the storyworld of the Belgian Congo, whilst at the same time he avoids any face threat to the colonial society more generally.

Keywords: Identity; The Belgian Congo; Gender; Interviews; Colonization; Assessments; Master narratives; Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

Colonial societies were characterized by a great deal of complexity (McClintock 1995: 10-11; Comaroff J.L. 1997: 165). Viewing them only in terms of "simple equations of domination and resistance" (Comaroff J. and Comaroff 1991: 5) based on binaries such as colonizer/colonized and Western/non-Western (see e.g. Cooper 1994: 1517), would be a reduction of the myriad of intersecting factors that influenced the hierarchical structure of these societies, and the way this structure was "contested, deflected, and appropriated" (Cooper 1994: 1517). Of course, even though the binary axis of the white colonizers versus the black colonized is too simplistic, this racial factor should not be minimized either. Racial distinction was structurally embedded as an organizing principle (Cooper and Stoler 1989: 611) in the construction of colonial power and authority. Its premises relied on the colonizers' perception of their own dominant position as 'natural' because they perceived themselves as superior in many ways, above all in an evolutionary, but also in a religious, linguistic and philosophical sense

(Errington 2008). Because of the framing of these differences as ‘natural’, colonial structures were legitimized as serving the *oeuvre civilisatrice*, in which, for example, European *languages* replaced the natives’ *idioms* (*parlers*, *dialects*) and in which Christian *religion* freed the indigenous people from *superstitions* (Fabian 1986: 82).

Essentially, many of these views are based on social Darwinism and from this perspective, human types were put on an evolutionary scale on the basis of race and gender. The white males were placed at the top of the hierarchy, while for example ‘tribal’ peoples typically had a lowly status (Comaroff J.L. and Comaroff 2009: 29) leading to the infantilizing framing of adult black males as “boys” (Comaroff J. and Comaroff 1991: 117). Next to this racial distinction, gender was also used as a criterion to hierarchically distinguish human types, and so basically all individuals who did not fit into the category of “adult white males” had a lower status, as for example the framing of - both black and white - women as atavistic and irrational beings (McClintock 1995: 40) illustrates. This demonstrates the non-binary nature of hierarchical relations in these colonial societies, since, as McClintock argues:

“race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways” (McClintock 1995: 5).

In this article, our aim is to go into narrative constructions of the complex position of women in the Belgian Congo¹, viewing this situation not as one in which this patriarchal ideology was simply “imposed” (Hunt 1989: 367), but, taking a social constructionist stance, as one in which all these factors are in constant negotiation.

The situation of colonized women in relation to the white colonizers, with the threat to “racial purity” (Cooper and Stoler 1989: 610) when sexual interactions occurred on the one hand, but with the “stabilizing effect” of concubinage on “political order and colonial health” (Stoler 1989: 637) on the other hand, has received significant attention in post-colonial studies and will not be focused upon further in this article. Instead, we zoom in on the position of European women in the colonial world, who are often invisible in official accounts of life in the colonies and, if referred to at all, are often very negatively stereotyped (Gartrell 1984: 165) as the agents of the “exacerbation of racial antagonisms by their treatment of Africans placed in subordinate roles” (Tiryakian 1993: 215). For example, the psychologist Mannoni describes the ‘racialist influence’ of European women in Madagascar, which he relates to – as Tiryakian sums up – “over-compensation for an inferiority complex, the desire to show her superiority over the [...] native woman, and in issuing tyrannical orders to the native males, an unconscious urge to dominate a male figure” (Tiryakian 1993: 215). Women were often not part of the group of official “agents of colonization” such as officials, and entrepreneurs (Cooper and Stoler 1989: 609) – even though there were exceptions, often in the form of women working in healthcare settings (e.g. British nurse-midwives in Sudan (Boddy 2007) or Belgian women organizing maternal and infant health programs in the Belgian Congo (Hunt 1997)). But in spite of this, it has been observed that their position was highly ambiguous, “as both subordinates in colonial hierarchies and as

¹ The former Belgian colony was called the Belgian Congo. In 1960 it gained independence and since 1997 it is known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo [DRC].

active agents of imperial culture in their own right” (Stoler 1989: 634). On the one hand, the position of European women in the colonies depended largely upon their husbands’ and thus it was clearly a subordinate one, meaning that wives “are ranked *solely* in terms of the status held by their husbands in the organization” (italics in the original), which implied that all their “personal attributes and prior achievements” are made “irrelevant in determining this derived status” (Gartrell 1984: 166). On the other hand, they were active agents as leaders of the colonial household. Also, they helped maintain civilized standards and “dignity” (Gartrell 1984: 168), in particular in terms of hygiene and sexuality, namely by preventing the men from having liaisons with indigenous women, which posed all kinds of political and ideological problems.

More specifically, this article investigates interviews with European women who lived in the Belgian Congo in the 1950s, thus before the country became independent in 1960. These women were interviewed several decades after they returned home. Crucially, they were interviewed by the same interviewer who is also a former colonial, but who differs in gender and in the position he occupied in Congolese colonial society. In particular, we focus on the way in which stereotypical images of these white colonial women are co-constructed and negotiated. As an additional research question in this article, we seek to highlight the interviewer’s role in influencing the production of a negotiated account of the position of women in colonial society. Interviews have gained a central place in qualitative research in a number of disciplines. However, ever since Cicourel’s (1964; 1976) observations that an interview *is* a form of social interaction that is influenced by both the interviewees’ and interviewers’ hidden assumptions, they have also been the object of debates about their validity (for an overview, see De Fina 2011a: 225-226) that can be grouped in either “extremes of confidence and criticism”, as De Fina and Perrino (2011: 1) describe:

“On one side there are those who try to erase the interactional context of the interview, believing that it is both possible and desirable to make participants forget about the event so that interviewers can access their “natural” behavior. On the opposite side there are those who argue that interviews are “inauthentic” and “artificial” contexts for data collection and therefore it is best to avoid them completely.” (De Fina and Perrino 2011: 1)

Neither of these extremes is very productive, since they both turn the interview into a *problem* that needs to be overcome (De Fina and Perrino 2011: 1). Instead, it is much more productive to view the interview as a real communicative event, as Cicourel already suggested in the 1960s (e.g. 1964), highlighting both its dialogic and contextualized nature. In recent years, many studies (e.g. Bartesaghi and Perlmutter Bowen 2009; De Fina 2009; De Fina 2011b) have taken this perspective on interviews as involving two “necessarily and unavoidably active” parties, namely the interviewer and the interviewee, who communicatively assemble meaning in the interview encounter (Holstein and Gubrium 2003: 68). At the same time, this collaborative meaning construction is related to its context and its interaction with master narratives. On the one hand, these can be considered as “historical, sociocultural forces” that “position speakers in their situated practices and construct who they are without their agentive involvement”, while on the other hand, speakers can “construct their identities vis-à-vis (...) dominant discourses and master narratives” (De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006: 7) and both participants in an interview encounter make use of this bi-

directional interplay of agency and master narratives. In order to thoroughly scrutinize this essential role of the interviewer to the fullest, rather than focusing primarily on the contributions of the interviewees, we zoom in on the interviewer's turns. Of course, this analysis relates these turns to those of the interviewees, because it is only in the interactional negotiation of meaning between the two interlocutors that the interviewer's actual contribution to the management of meaning construction and negotiation can be uncovered.

Our angle to these data and their context is ideally suited for this research question. This is because the interlocutors share the fact that they lived in the Belgian Congo and thus have similar claims to knowledge about this topic. Consequently, in spite of the fact that in theory, interviewers often construct their discursive role in the interaction as fairly restricted, in this case, the interviewer's colonial experience gives him the potential to talk a true participant role in the interaction into being. However, because of the focus on topics related to the position of women in colonial societies, the two interlocutors differ in their claims to knowledge, since the interviewer is male and thus only has second hand knowledge about this topic. Furthermore, the issue itself is also interesting because of the complex relation between the colonial endeavor, which was typically a man's world, and the ambiguous position of women, who were both passive and active agents in these colonial structures (Stoler 1989: 634). So the interviewer has both an insider (as a former fellow-colonial) and an outsider (as a man) status, which may influence the negotiation of meaning in the interview. Finally, given the many decades between the narrated events and the act of narrating, there were many opportunities for self-regard and editing (Linde 1993: 105). Such corrections of the self that is being created in stories (Linde 1993: 105) are especially anticipated in these data since the interviews deal with issues about which master narratives have altered significantly in the course of the last decades. This is the case for the two interacting topics that are the focus of this article, namely (1) colonialism, that was still regarded as a benevolent enterprise in the 1950s, in which civilization was brought to the so-called 'dark continent' and (2) the position of women in society in the 1950s as subordinate to their husbands in which their roles were often reduced to those of housewives and mothers. Both interlocutors have a different degree of involvement in these issues: While both were involved in the former issue, only the interviewees, and not the interviewer, were personally the focal point in the latter. It is thus our aim to investigate how in these interviews, both interlocutors negotiate and co-construct meaning and identity in relation to these master narratives about the set-up of, and in particular the situation of white women in, colonial societies when they are discussed after a time lapse of almost half a century, during which these particular master narratives have undergone considerable changes.

2. Data description

The corpus under study here was obtained through the efforts of a Flemish association² that was founded in 2004 by a group of former colonials. They pursued a twofold purpose, namely preserving a crucial piece of Belgian cultural heritage and aiding

² For reasons of anonymity, we agreed neither to disclose the name of the association nor to provide too many details regarding the data collection.

scientific research regarding the Belgian Congo (and to a lesser extent also regarding the Belgian former colonials in Rwanda and Burundi). In order to achieve these goals, between 2004 and 2011, the association interviewed 266 former colonials. In cooperation with KADOC, the Documentation and Research Center for Religion, Culture and Society (University of Leuven), the audio- and videotapes (consisting of close-ups of the interviewees) of the interviews, as well as a thematic summary and index of the content of these interviews, were stored in its archives.

Because we zoom in on the aspect of gender in this article, we limit ourselves to the in-depth study of a limited number of interviews with female former colonials³. The excerpts presented in our analyses come from three (videotaped) interviews⁴ that were collected between 2005 and 2010, thus almost half a century after the interviewees returned to Belgium. All the interviewees were housewives who followed their husbands to Africa. They were very positive about their experiences in the Belgian Congo and they all returned to Belgium against their will in 1959 or 1960 because of Congolese independence. The interviews each lasted between about half an hour and an hour. Here is a more detailed description of the interviewees:

- Interviewee 1 is the wife of a car mechanic and the mother of two children who lived in the Belgian Congo for three years. She followed her husband to Africa six months after he left Belgium.
- Interviewee 2 was married to an agricultural engineer with whom she had two children. Her husband worked and travelled a lot in the jungle and she followed him on his travels.
- Interviewee 3 lived in the Belgian Congo for eight years and she says she had always dreamed of moving to Africa since she was 10 years old. Her husband was a farmer who subsequently worked for a banana company and on coffee plantations. They had four children.

As mentioned above, these women were interviewed by the same interviewer who is a former colonial himself and who is roughly the same age as the interviewees. At a number of points throughout the interviews, this interviewer emphasizes his epistemic status as an expert regarding life and social norms in the Belgian Congo, sometimes explicitly asserting that he knows how the system worked or what family life typically looked like in those days. For his work, he mostly lived outside the cities and sometimes in the interviews, he even self-categorizes as ‘a hunter’, thus highlighting his vast experience with life in the jungle. This makes these data particularly interesting for our analyses, since, rather than being typical research interviews with a relatively large distance between a ‘neutral’ interviewer and the interviewees, these interviews are interactions between *former colleagues* so to speak. The interviewer’s epistemic status

³ Because incomplete access to the entire corpus was granted to us, we explained our goals and interests to the corpus manager who selected a number of interviews for us. We only describe the three interviews from which the excerpts that are discussed in the analyses are taken.

⁴ These interviews were transcribed following the Jeffersonian transcription conventions by Mathias Pagnaer and Dorien Van De Mierop.

and personal involvement in colonial life is essential for our analyses, since the interviewer's contributions form the primary focus of our analyses.

3. Analyses

Although these interviews have a fairly factual tone and mainly seem to record the practical aspects of colonial life (such as: Where the Belgians lived, what their housing conditions were, what happened during the struggle for independence), there is also an underlying orientation to the master narrative of a patriarchal system in which women are constructed as having a subordinate role. Such hints to the colonial hegemonic system of male supremacy are present throughout these interviews, but they are first and foremost visible in the interviewer's questions. These have a guiding influence on the interviews not only because of their essential role in selecting the topics that will be discussed, but also because of the suggestive nature in which they are formulated. For example, in the first part of the interview, the interviewer often explicitly probes for the reason why the interviewee went to the Belgian Congo. In this introductory question, which usually occurs right after the interviewee briefly presents herself, the interviewer often immediately causally relates the interviewees' departure to their husbands' presence in the Belgian Congo. In so doing, he projects the identity of the docile woman on the other interlocutor from the start of the interview. For example, he often repeats (a version of) the phrase: 'of course, you followed your husband', in which the adverb (*natuurlijk*, 'of course') underlines that it goes without saying that this was the interviewee's reason for going to the Belgian Congo. However, this phrase is not always used in questions: Sometimes, as can be seen in the following extract taken from interview 1, it functions differently in its local context.

Excerpt 1 (interview 1)

- 1 IE *Ik ben D. (.) geboren op twintig mei 1934*
 2 *en gehuwd met C. Ik heb=euh bijna drie jaar doorgebracht*
 3 *in Congo, in de provincie euh Maniema*
 4 *(.) op grondgebied euh Kingombe.*
 -> 5 IR *Euh (.) u bent natuurlijk uw man geweest vervolgen,*
 6 *maar=euh hebt gij u vooraleer te vertrekken,*
 7 *een beetje voorbereid euh om naar Congo te gaan?*

- 1 IE I am D. (.) born on twenty May 1934
 2 and married to C. I have=erm spent almost three years
 3 in Congo, in the province erm Maniema
 4 (.) on the territory erm Kingombe.
 -> 5 IR Erm (.) of course you have been ((to)) follow your husband,
 6 but=erm have you before leaving,
 7 prepared yourself a bit erm to go to Congo?

The recording starts with the interviewee's self-presentation (for which the probe by the interviewer is not present in any of the recordings) in lines 1-4. Interestingly, although she mentions her husband (line 2), she consistently uses a personal perspective in this self-presentation (hence the 1st person singular pronominal forms in lines 1 and 2). In the subsequent turn (line 5), the interviewer immediately provides an account for this by

placing it within the framework of her marriage, which she only mentioned briefly in line 2. As noted above, the adverb *natuurlijk* ('of course') underlines the self-evident nature of the assumption that the reason for the interviewee's arrival in the Belgian Congo is her husband's presence there. The lack of rising intonation and the fact that there is no pause to allow a transition to a turn by the interviewee, clearly marks this utterance as an assessment of the interviewee's prior turn, rather than a follow-up question as would be expected in an interview context. This assessment renders the interviewee's prior turn accountable by referring to hegemonic discourses of female docility within a marriage. Since it offers no space for comment by the interviewee in a second assessment, this assessment also renders her voiceless at an interactional level which is quite reminiscent of the typical role of women in a patriarchal society. It is only after this assessment, that the interviewer asks a follow-up question which shifts topic to her preparations prior to departure to the Belgian Congo.

Of course, even though these questions can set a particular frame which complies with these patriarchal norms, it is up to the interviewees to respond to, and potentially refute, these when they are able to take the floor. In their answers, they can either ratify or counter this master narrative, which can then lead to negotiations of these norms. Typically, we see 'ratifying scenarios' in these interviews, as in the following fragment:

Excerpt 2 (interview 3)

- | | | |
|----|----|--|
| 77 | IR | <i>En ja, als Vlaams meisje, een beetje van op de buiten en zo meer,</i> |
| 78 | | <i>en dat was nogal ↑iets</i> |
| 79 | IE | <i>Dat was inderdaad een=euh iets speciaals,</i> |
| 80 | | <i>want ik ga u zeggen wanneer ik</i> |
| 81 | | <i>in Congo, in Leopoldstad aangekomen ben,</i> |
| 82 | | <i>was mijn man ernstig ziek. Hij had een dingk euh=</i> |
| 83 | IR | <i>=Ma↑laria</i> |
| 84 | IE | <i>°Nee°</i> |
| 85 | IR | <i>Hematu↑rie</i> |
| 86 | IE | <i>Ja, een ding, ach nee, () amoebiennes hé</i> |
| 87 | IR | <i>Ah ja, amoeben=</i> |
| 88 | IE | <i>=Am[oeben ja. Hij] was zeer ernstig ziek.</i> |
| 89 | IR | <i>[°heel (ernstig)°]</i> |
| | | |
| 77 | IR | And yes, as a Flemish girl, a bit from the countryside and so on, |
| 78 | | and that was quite ↑something |
| 79 | IE | That was indeed a= erm something special, |
| 80 | | because I will tell you when I |
| 81 | | arrived in Congo, in Leopoldville, |
| 82 | | my husband was seriously ill. He had a thing erm= |
| 83 | IR | =Ma↑laria |
| 84 | IE | °No° |
| 85 | IR | Haema↑tura |
| 86 | IE | Yes, a thing, oh no, () amoebiennes hey |
| 87 | IR | Ah yes, amoeba= |
| 88 | IE | =Am[oeba yes. He] was very seriously ill. |
| 89 | IR | [°very (serious)°] |

In line 77, the interviewer introduces his question and characterizes the interviewee as 'a girl', even though she was a married woman with children at that time. This highlights her gender and her young age, and, together with some geographic references qualifying her as 'Flemish' and 'a bit from the countryside' (line 77), as such he draws attention to her lack of experience with the rest of the world. On the one hand, he hedges this statement ('a bit'), but on the other hand the addition 'and so on' suggests that the interviewer lists just a few elements, but could enumerate a lot more to illustrate the interviewee's weak position as a young woman with limited international experience. It is only after this initial characterization that the interviewer actually probes for the interviewee's arrival in the Belgian Congo. This is not a neutrally formulated question however, but rather an assessment of his prior talk, as also shown by the word order typical of affirmative sentences. By means of this assessment (line 79: 'that was indeed a= erm something special'), the interviewer implies that the interviewee is surprised because of her lack of experience, as he illustrated in the previous line. As Pomerantz (1984) points out, an assessment normatively requires a conditionally relevant second assessment. In this case, through the rising intonation of the final word (*↑iets*, '*↑something*', line 78), the interviewer constructs a clear preference for a corroborating assessment. So he simultaneously projects an identity upon the interviewee regarding her situation, and her discursive rights, namely those of a corroborator of the interviewer's views. As such, he not only explicitly constructs a subordinate role for the interviewee on the denotational level, but he also implicitly mirrors this on the interactional level (cf Wortham 2003), thus talking the master narrative of patriarchy into being both regarding the division of roles and rights in the story as well as in the interactional situation of the interview.

The interviewee immediately confirms this statement and even boosts it ('indeed', 'something special', line 79), which is the typical format for a second assessment showing alignment and agreement (Pomerantz 1984) and her formulation emblematically resonates the interviewer's statement of line 78, thus not only complying with the discourse of male supremacy on a content level, but also on a discursive level. However, in line 80, the interviewee initiates a story that is framed as explanatory, as indicated by the use of the causal conjunction *because*, and she interestingly provides a preliminary performative 'I will tell you', as such seemingly bidding for additional floor holding rights than those of a mere corroborator of the interviewer's statements. Although, in the orientation phase, this story initially focuses on her arrival in Kinshasa ('Leopoldville'), the focus immediately shifts to the interviewee's husband in the complicating action, who becomes the protagonist in the rest of the story. This is in line with the norms of the patriarchal society in which women have subordinate roles to men who are typically the protagonists of the action. This was already talked into being in this interview by means of the initial identity projection of the docile woman who 'self-evidently followed her husband', as discussed above.

Interestingly, the interviewee searches for the name of the exact disease from which her husband suffered, as the vague term (*een dingk*, 'a thing') and the hesitation in line 82 indicate. The interviewer latches on a bid for the correct term of the disease to this hesitation, and after a negative evaluation (line 84), he makes another bid (line 85), as marked by the prosodic similarity between lines 83 and 85. This not only marks the interviewer's involvement, but also his knowledge of frequent tropical diseases. Of course, since he does not know the details of the interviewee's life story, he cannot be

sure of the correct answer, hence the rising intonation. In spite of this insecurity about the correct answer, his ability to make a number of bids illustrates his epistemic status.

The interviewee responds by an affirmative particle, but then again voices her search for the correct term ('a thing, oh no', line 86) and after some mumbled words, comes up with 'amoebiennes'. Crucially, in the next turn, the interviewer not only confirms, but he also repairs this term, replacing the substandard with the standard language variant 'amoeba' by means of an other-initiated other-repair. The interviewee then latches on a repetition of this repaired term, and explicitly confirms its correctness by means of the affirmative particle 'yes' (line 88). Consequently, the interviewer constructs his identity as an expert in tropical diseases in collaboration with the interviewee, who explicitly accepts the interviewer's repair.

The interviewer then overlaps with an evaluation of the seriousness of this disease, but in the meantime, the interviewee holds the floor and continues her story about her husband's physical condition. So she picks up the thread of her story again by repeating her initial statement of line 82. This repeated statement only differs from the latter by the addition of the booster *very* ('zeer'). This addition again resonates the interviewer's words, in this case the booster he used in his qualification of the disease that is produced in overlap with the interviewee (line 89: 'heel (serieus)', *very* (*serious*)). After this, the interviewee continues her story.

So in this excerpt, the interviewer projects the identity of a naïve woman onto the interviewee and formulates his *question* as a *statement* that only needs corroboration, thus also projecting a limited discursive role upon the interviewee in the construction of her answer. As such, the patriarchal ideology is talked into being both at a story and a discursive level. Interestingly, the interviewee goes along with this. On a story level, she not only confirms the interviewer's identity projection, but she also almost immediately topicalizes her husband in her story, even though the interviewer's probe was directed at the interviewee's experiences when arriving in Africa. Furthermore, also on the interactional level, the interviewee complies with the interviewer's distribution of turn rights, his choice of topics, his knowledge displaying bids for the correct term (lines 83, 85), his other-initiated other-repair (line 87), his formulations (e.g. illustrated by the mirroring in lines 79 and 88) and so on. So on both levels, the interviewee ratifies the identity projected upon her by the interviewer, and as such, the typical division of the roles in the colonial society is constructed.

These typical roles and the negative stereotypes of women in the colonial world (cf e.g. Gartrell 1984; Tiryakian 1993) are also a topic of discussion in several interviews. Sometimes these questions are asked in a straightforward, even bald on record, way (e.g. interview 1), but in other cases, such questions are presented in a highly mitigated and negotiated way, as in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 3a (interview 3)

- 598 IR *Zeg euh zo een paar vraagjes dus die ik aan u durf vragen*
 599 *dus het zijn geen gemakkelijke vragen=*
 600 IE *=Oei °@@°*
 601 IR *Ja euh ik heb eens een boek gelezen over*
 602 *de <blanke stadsvrouw> in Congo (.)*
 603 *spijtig genoeg [ken ik de naam nie]t,*
 604 IE *[@@ [ja*

the second person plural form (line 615: *jullie*, ‘you’), thus asking a more collectively oriented question and projecting the group identity of ‘Belgian women in the Congo’ upon the interviewee, which is more in line with the generic formulations in the first part of the question (lines 609-612). The interviewee begins a turn, but is overlapped by the interviewer who talks more loudly so as to keep the floor and completes his turn.

When the interviewee gains the floor, she provides the following answer, which is then extensively negotiated by the interviewer in the subsequent turns:

Excerpt 3b (interview 3)

- 617 IE Ah *luistert* (.) *we waren in elk geval toch hui=allé* (.)
 618 *we waren- ik persoonlijk had niet een ho- nie een diploma*
 619 *van hoger onderwijs of van universiteit,*
 620 *dus ik was toch (.) huisvrouw, natuurlijk (hadden we daar)*
 621 *door het feit dat we: dat het daar heel warm was,*
 622 *hadden we personeel (.) die- maar euh bijvoorbeeld*
 623 *ik werkte toch elke voormiddag in mijnen hof.*
 624 IR Ja. Want zo die die die kritiek euh utoefent die vergeet
 625 *natuurlijk een klein beet↑je dat <hier in België euh toen*
 626 *euh de vrouw op euh economisch gebied> en [zo meer*
 627 IE [(IE nods))
 628 IR *dus he ↑ook niet veel betekende he*
 629 *toen waren er nog geen vrouwelijke managers en zo meer=*
 630 IE =°Ah ↓neen°=
 631 IR =Ja (.) maar goed (.) zo omdat er in de Congo
 632 *dat dan zo duidelijk ↑merkbaar was he (.)*
 633 *dus euh was het (.) tekende dat zich wat scherper af he.*
 634 IE Ik moet zeggen (.) ik heb daar no- nooit nooit
 635 *veel last van gehad (.) >en in de namiddag*
 636 *hield ik mij met mijn kinders bezig< en en.*
 637 IR °Ja°
- 617 IE Ah listen (.) we were in any case anyway hou= well (.)
 618 we were- I personally did not have a hi- not a degree
 619 of higher education or of university,
 620 so I was a housewife (.) anyway, of course (we had there)
 621 because of the fact that we: that it was very warm there,
 622 we had staff (.) who- but erm for example
 623 I still worked every morning in my garden.
 624 IR Yes. Because so the one who erm criticizes he forgets
 625 of course a little b↑it that <here in Belgium erm then
 626 erm the woman on erm an economic level> and [so on
 627 IE [(IE nods))
 628 IR so hey ↑also did not mean much hey
 629 there were no female managers then yet and so on=
 630 IE =°Ah ↓no°=
 631 IR =Yes (.) but okay (.) so because in the Congo
 632 that was then so clearly ↑noticeable hey (.)
 633 so erm it was (.) that stood out a bit more sharply hey.
 634 IE I have to say (.) I have ne- never never
 635 had much trouble with that (.) >and in the afternoon

636 I occupied myself with my children< and and.
 637 IR °Yes°

In line 617, the interviewee begins her turn from a general perspective by mirroring the interviewer's collective footing ('we' in lines 617-618) and she projects, through the unfinished turn, the self-categorization of this group as housewives (line 617 *hou=*). However, she then reformulates her incomplete utterance, prefacing the continuation of the turn with *allé* (translated as 'well'), and then abruptly shifts to a personal footing to self-categorize as a housewife with a relatively low level of education (lines 618-620). Therefore, she indicates that she did not have an important role, thus implicitly agreeing with the interviewer's statement that women were superfluous. After a short pause, she moves back to a general footing and starts to account for the relative inutility of women by contextual factors (lines 621-622). However, shifting again to the personal level, this is then contrasted (hence the contrastive conjunction *maar* ('but') in line 622) with an example of a chore the interviewee did herself (line 623), thus mitigating her previous statement (line 622: 'we had staff'). As such, she saves her own face by anticipatorily countering the potential criticism that she was lazy or authoritarian towards her African servants.

In sum, the reply is fairly ambivalent, shifting from the personal to the general level. On the one hand, at a general level, she implicitly agrees with the interviewer because by stating that it was hot and they had domestic servants, she implies that housewives did not work (and were thus superfluous). On the other hand, she implies that some women, herself included, were not superfluous. For this, she shifts to a personal level, describing her work in the garden (line 623), thus saving her own face. So this reply is characterized by a great deal of ambivalence, which potentially leaves this answer open to reformulation by the interviewer.

In the subsequent line (line 624), the interviewer starts his turn by means of an agreement token ('yes') to this somewhat contradictory reply. He then continues with a turn that provides an account for the interviewee's prior turn as the initial causal conjunction (*want*, 'because', line 624) indicates. This accounts for the excessive criticism of the author of the book as regards women in the Belgian Congo and he formulates (Heritage and Watson 1979) the meaning of the sense of the interviewee's response as being that women in general, in both the Belgian Congo and Belgium, 'did not mean much' (*niet veel betekende*, line 628). To support this, he cites the fact that there were no female managers at that time either. The interviewer's contribution is reminiscent of the role of the teacher in classroom interaction, who takes the third turn in which the student's response to the teacher's question is evaluated (Sinclair and Brazil 1982). As such, he privileges his own interpretation of the interviewee's prior turn, thus assuming epistemic authority, and so, at a discursive level, reproducing a male hegemonic status quo.

The interviewee aligns with these observations, by nodding (line 627) and by latching on a softly pronounced negative particle with a falling intonation (line 630) that confirms the negation in the previous line (concerning the absence of female managers). The interviewer then immediately latches on a new turn, first acknowledging the interviewee's contribution ('yes', line 631). Then, by means of a contrastive conjunction ('but') and a topic closing 'okay', he shifts back to the initial assessment that women were superfluous in the Belgian Congo. However, here he adds to this assessment that it simply stood out more there in comparison to in Belgium, thus

making the point that this was not a defect of colonial society. As such, he saves the face of the colonials, but at the same time, the misogynistic point that he is making, threatens the face of women in general, and the interviewee in particular.

In short, in lines 624 and following, through framing the gist of the interviewee's ambivalent response as agreeing, the interviewer effectively answers his own question. In this respect, it is as if he asks a question to which he already has the answer – a phenomenon which researchers such as Cullen (1998) point out is typical of classroom interaction where the teacher already knows the answer and is just probing to test the extent of the students' knowledge. As such, the interviewer clearly constructs for himself the identity of expert in the field who has a higher epistemic status than the interviewee. Also on a discursive level, he is in charge, since he formulates the gist of her reply and accounts for these assessments. By clearly projecting his own point of view as the answer to the question, he renders the interviewee voiceless and places her in an interactionally weaker position which is quite contrary to the expected goal of an interview, namely getting the interviewee's point of view.

In the following turn, the interviewee shifts back to a personal footing, thus allowing the interviewer's assessment to be true on a general level, but countering it on a personal level. To do this, she uses the Extreme Case Formulation 'never' (Pomerantz 1986) which is also emphasized through its repetition. Consequently, she effectively opposes the interviewer's assessment and thus implicitly counters his assumed right to assess which has rendered her voiceless. Moreover, in line 635 she skip connects (Sacks 1992: 349 (vol 2)) to her prior talk (line 623: 'I still worked every morning in my garden'). By the use of the conjunction 'and', she adds an increment (Ford, Fox and Thompson 2002) to this prior turn, which is clearly a continuation of this turn given the logical temporal progression (line 623: Morning; line 635: Afternoon) and the continued enumeration of chores (line 636: 'I occupied myself with my children'). In this way, the interviewee orients to the interviewer's formulation and assessment of *her* answer as a side sequence (Jefferson 1972), while at the same time continuing to counter the possible identity projection of her being an authoritarian colonialist who bossed around African servants. Her challenge to his assessment is met with an acknowledgment token ('°yes°') and instead of pursuing the issue further the interviewer changes topic by asking another question (see excerpt 3c).

So in excerpts 3a and 3b we observed extensive negotiation work of the identity projection of the uselessness and authoritarian behaviour of white women in the Belgian Congo. Already from the start, the interviewer mitigates and negotiates the formulation of his question, constantly oscillating between a personal and a generic perspective, as such creating a distance between the content of the question on the one hand and himself and the interviewee on the other. Also the interviewer's extensive contribution to the construction of an answer to this question is remarkable. Interestingly, this negotiation is not oriented to saving the interviewee's face, which would imply the mitigation of the idea that women were superfluous in 1950s-society, but it is directed at constructing society in the Belgian Congo as similar to Belgian society, or society as a whole (cf. the lack of female managers in general, line 629). So, rather than the superfluous position of women, it is the potential deviance of life in the Belgian Congo, as was implied in the question, that is negotiated and refuted by the interviewer.

This excerpt is immediately followed by the following excerpt in which another question along the same lines is introduced:

Excerpt 3c (interview 3)

- 638 IR *Een andere een andere eu:h uitdrukking dus*
 639 *da[t ik ook ge[lezen heb was (.) euh dus he:*
 640 IE *[ja [ja*
 641 IR *het ↑moederland dus he: () euh door de vakanties*
 642 *van de kolonialen euh (.) verachtte ()*
 643 *de blanke koloniale vrouwen ↑meer (.) dan de mannen.*
 644 (1.5)
 645 IR *Dat is zoiets euh (.) ja en euh=*
 646 IE *=Dat zou kunnen, dat zou kunnen=*
 647 IR *=() een voorbeeld te zeggen (.)*
 648 *a- als een man vertelde over zijn job in Congo*
 649 *waren zijn vrienden en collega's een beetje jaloe:rs (),*
 650 *maar eu:hm bij deeu:h vrouwen=euh*
 651 *als ze (.) de de ja de vrouwen hier hoorden*
 652 *dat hun zus of hun vriendin van vroeger (.)*
 653 *euh personeel had, niet moest koken,*
 654 *dat dat bijna on£verdraaglijk was£*
 655 IE *Ah, luister een keer, het heeft hen*
 656 *hun ook niemand belet van niet te gaan.*
 657 IR *Zeer goed antwoord. °Ja° Ja. Ja.*
- 638 IR *Another another e:rm expression so*
 639 *tha[t I have al[so read was (.) erm so he:y*
 640 IE *[yes [yes*
 641 IR *the ↑motherland so he:y () erm because of the holidays*
 642 *of the colonials erm (.) despised ()*
 643 *the white colonial women ↑more (.) than the men.*
 644 (1.5)
 645 IR *That is something erm (.) yes and erm=*
 646 IE *=That is possible, that is possible=*
 647 IR *=() to name an example (.)*
 648 *i- if a man told about his job in Congo*
 649 *his friends and colleagues were a bit jealou:s (),*
 650 *but e:rm with the: women=erm*
 651 *if they (.) the the yes the women here heard*
 652 *that their sister or their friend from before (.)*
 653 *erm had staff, did not have to cook,*
 654 *that that was al£most unbearable£*
 655 IE *Ah, listen for a bit, it hasn't*
 656 *nobody stopped them from going either.*
 657 IR *Very good answer. °Yes° Yes. Yes.*

In quite a similar way, the interviewer introduces his question by means of a hesitant preface in which he distances himself from the content of the question by attributing it to another source (lines 638-639). Interestingly, in the question itself, the interviewer immediately constructs an us-them opposition between the ingroup of the colonials versus the outgroup of the people who stayed in Belgium, who are referred to as 'the motherland' (line 641). The latter are said to 'despise' (line 642) the colonial women. This is a direct voicing of the prejudices that are said to have been quite widespread

against female colonials (Gartrell, 1984). Interestingly, the interviewer mitigates this by also involving the colonial men in this issue (line 643), implying a certain, though lesser, degree of contempt towards the men as well. As such, ingroup solidarity between the colonials across the sexes is created, and the us-them opposition colonial/non-colonial is enforced. At what could retrospectively be seen as the end of the turn (line 643), no uptake is forthcoming from the interviewee. Normatively, a question requires a conditionally relevant reply, so faced with silence the interviewer self-selects again to add a vague and hesitant follow-up statement which, following Pomerantz (1984), could project a modified, weaker assessment designed to elicit agreement. However, in this case, as the interviewer's turn is not completed, any analysis of the turn remains speculative. The interviewee now latches on a non-committal affirmative response (line 646: 'that is possible, that is possible') in which her involvement is downplayed and distance is created between herself and this topic (line 646) and which constitutes a classic dispreferred turn shape of weak agreement that acts as a preface to upcoming disagreement (Pomerantz 1984: 72).

Instead of orienting to this rather qualified and reserved agreement as a harbinger of fuller disagreement, the interviewer ignores it, thus underlining his interactional dominance, and he continues his turn by giving an example of contempt towards the colonials. There are interesting mechanisms at work in this part of the excerpt, since the focus of the issue is now shifted to the outgroup of the non-colonial Belgians and their jealousy is topicalized. As such, the discussion of the reason for this contempt towards colonial women is averted and the ingroup/outgroup opposition is further emphasized. This opposition is enforced by asserting that jealousy was a general characteristic of the outgroup, since the non-colonial men are described as 'a bit jealous' (lines 649) as well. This is of course weaker than the 'almost unbearable' jealousy (line 654) in the case of the women, but still, it underlines the similarity within the outgroup. Again, the attribution of this explicit negative feature to women is fairly face threatening for the interviewee, given the fact that she is a woman. However, the hedge ('almost', line 654) and the smile voice, which consists of "a markedly higher pitch and an intonational contour comparable to laughing during speaking but without any laughter tokens" (Buttny 2001: 317), mitigate this strong wording.

In the following turn, the interviewee aligns with the interviewer's assessment by further contributing to this construction of the ingroup/outgroup opposition and formulates quite an assertive criticism of the jealousy of the stay-at-home Belgians. On the one hand, the assertive nature of her reaction can be related to the fact that the interviewer brings forward the presence of staff in the Belgian Congo as the reason for the stay-at-home women's jealousy, thus implying that the housewives had quite an easy, lazy life in colonial society. On the other hand, she uses the gender-neutral 3rd person plural pronominal form in her reaction, thus implicitly widening the scope to the entire outgroup and blurring the gender-relatedness of this issue in line with the interviewer's colonial ingroup/non-colonial outgroup dichotomy. In the next turn, the interviewer explicitly agrees with the interviewee's counter and actually emphatically evaluates it, which is quite remarkable in the context of an autobiographical interview, in which an interviewee's answers are rarely judged as right, wrong, good or bad. So the interviewer is explicitly 'doing evaluation' here, which implicitly constructs his epistemic authority to judge the interviewee's assessments, much in the same way as teachers evaluate students' responses in a classroom context (Sinclair and Brazil 1982).

Interestingly, throughout this negotiation, it is clear that the preference for agreement with the initial question is inverted here, and even actively made irrelevant by the interviewer. This is done by subverting the focus of the question (from the reasons for despising colonial women to the jealousy of non-colonial women), as such further contributing to the construction of an us-them opposition on the colonial/non-colonial axis. This shift is not less face threatening for women because of the negative categorization of women as extremely jealous human beings. At the same time, the interviewer's subversion of the focus of the question saves the face of colonials in general. So again, this excerpt attests the unproblematic nature of talking into being negative stereotypes for women, but it also illustrated that a lot of negotiation work is done to avert any negative typifications of colonial life.

Following up on this, we would like to draw attention to the fact that throughout the interviews, there is hardly any form of criticism of the colonial system. Especially in the interviewer's questions, a critical stance or probes for the downsides of colonial society are noticeably absent. Since interviewees hardly ever initiate these topics themselves, no critical voices are heard in the interviews. However, there is one exception, and this can be seen in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4 (interview 2)

- 380 IE Er waren mensen van N (.) een gewoon meisje
 381 dat ik zeker weet dat geen Frans kon,
 382 maar dan na drie j-, drie jaar en ik kwam die terug tegen (.)
 383 ze was al haar Vlaams vergeten (.)
 384 En dat maakte me zo woest.
 385 Ik zeg dat, drie vierde van de Congo is kapot gegaan
 386 door de blanke vrouwen.
 387 (2.3)
 388 IR Legt u dat eens uit.
 389 IE Euh, ten eerste, d'er zijn veel vrouwen euh gegaan
 390 die eigenlijk (.) van thuis uit, bijzonder de Walen,
 391 van lagere klasse (.) die kwamen ginder en
 392 die kregen een machts:gevoel.
 393 Ik heb er geweten, vrouwen, die hun boys sloegen
 394 omdat hem een glas had gebroken,
 395 of omdat er een stuk euh van houtskool,
 396 van de: dinge- van de strijkijzer op een hemd (.)
 397 h• en dan heb ik gezegd (.)
 398 “de vrouwen hebben hun niet kunnen aanpassen
 399 aan het leven die hadde:n veryeling”, er waren vrouwen
 400 die zaten zo die lieten hun zakdoek vallen.
 401 Die riepen- allé, ↑brU:lden achter de boy
 402 voor die zakdoek op te rapen.
 403 Vond u dat normaal, dat vind ik niet normaal.
 404 (2.7)
 405 IE De mannen werkten, maar de vrouwen die waren (.)↑he agressie::f
 406 (3.2)
 407 IE Die- ↑he machtswellust, gewoon
 408 machtswellust.
 409 (4.0)
 410 IR •hh oh ja, en als u dan terug in België kwam

- 380 IE There were people from N (.) an ordinary girl
 381 of whom I know for sure that she couldn't speak French,
 382 but then after three y-, three years and I ran into her again (.)
 383 she had forgotten all her Flemish (.)
 384 And that made me so furious.
 385 I tell you, three quarters of the Congo has fallen apart
 386 because of the white women.
- 387 (2.3)
 388 IR Explain that for a bit.
- 389 IE Erm, firstly, a lot of women erm have gone there
 390 who actually (.) from home, especially the Walloons,
 391 of the lower class (.) who came over there and
 392 who got a a sense: of power.
 393 I have known some, women, who hit their servants
 394 because he had broken a glass,
 395 or because a piece erm of charcoal,
 396 of the: thing- iron on a shirt (.)
 397 h• and then I have said (.)
 398 “the women have not been able to adapt themselves
 399 to the life they ha:d boredom”, there were women
 400 who sat like this who dropped their handkerchief.
 401 Who yelled- well, ↑rOA:red to the servant
 402 to pick up that handkerchief.
 403 Did you think that was normal, I think that is not normal.
- 404 (2.7)
 405 IE The men worked, but the women they were (.) ↑hey agre:ssive
- 406 (3.2)
 407 IE Who- ↑hey perverted exercise of power, just
 408 perverted exercise of power.
- 409 (4.0)
 410 IR •hh oh yes, and when you were then back in Belgium

This excerpt starts with a discussion of language use in the Belgian Congo, which followed the interviewer's question about which languages the interviewee had to learn (lines 373-374). This discussion is related to the fact that Belgium has long been a French-dominated state and “the pace at which Dutch gained ground in Belgium [...] was not paralleled by a similar rate of progress in the Congo”, even though steps were undertaken towards the official equalization of Dutch to French in the Belgian Congo (Meeuwis 2011a: 1281-1282, see also Meeuwis 2011b). The interviewee sketches her own anti-French position in this situation and illustrates this with a story about a girl from a Flemish town (indicated here as N), as sketched in the orientation phase (line 380), who allegedly forgot her native language. The interviewee concludes her story by displaying her feelings towards this event (line 384: That made me so furious). The extreme adjective (*woest*, ‘furious’, line 384) and the intonational stress mark these feelings as strongly negative. Then she adds a coda to the story, which widens the scope further, to the situation in ‘the Congo’ and the involvement of ‘white women’ in the downfall of the colonial system (lines 385-386). So in the middle of this discussion about a topic that is gender-neutral (namely language use), the interviewee initiates this

topic which clearly also threatens her own face, because she is white, female, and colonial and thus, in her own words, she could have contributed to the ‘falling apart’ of the Belgian Congo.

Having made such an assessment, a conditionally relevant second turn is normatively required, but in this case there is a relatively long pause of 2.3 seconds which marks the assessment as being problematic in some way. After the pause, the interviewer does not provide a further assessment as would be ‘normal’ (Pomerantz 1984), but asks for further explanation indicating that the assessment is in some way incomplete or problematic. In the subsequent line, the interviewee then describes the white women’s aggressive behavior towards their black staff. She clearly distances herself from these women on the basis of their geographic origin (line 390: ‘Walloons’) and their social class (line 391). This construction of an outgroup is further supported in the course of the story by the consistent use of relative clauses to describe the actions, which all have the generic plural form ‘women’ (lines 389, 393, 399) as their antecedent. This antecedent stresses the non-involved nature of the interviewee, who as such contributes to the construction of the factuality and general scope of her account. Furthermore, the interviewee vividly enacts her descriptions (cf the intonational stresses in lines 393 and 401) of intentional humiliations (line 400-402) and severe punishments for minor violations by the staff (e.g. the breaking of a glass, line 394). In the middle of her turn (line 398-399), the interviewee inserts a direct quote that reports her own negative evaluation of ‘the women’, as such again distancing herself from this group and its practices. She ends her turn by directly addressing the interviewer in line 403. Whilst this utterance is in a grammatical question form, as Koshik (2005: 2) points out, it can be hearable as making an assertion of opposite polarity to the question (i.e., ‘it is not normal’). In this case, the interviewee continues the turn without any pause which would allow the interviewer to reply and in the continuation of her turn, she provides the answers to her own question: ‘I think that is not normal’. Interestingly, even though the question and answer in line 403 take a brief sidestep from the storyworld and are situated in the here and now of storytelling – as the use of the present tense in the interviewee’s answer also underlines – the interviewee uses a past verb tense in her initial question (‘did you think’). As such, she actually orients to the other interlocutor as a former colonial, rather than as an interviewer who would be addressed by means of a question in the present tense. As such, the interviewee underlines the other interlocutor’s former presence in that exact same world and thus makes relevant his identity as a witness of such practices.

Given the immediate provision of an answer to her own question in line 403, the interviewee retrospectively orients to her own turn as a rhetorical question requiring no answer because the answer is so obvious. This assessment makes a second assessment a conditionally relevant next action, but it receives no reply which thus marks this assessment as being somehow problematic. After the 2.7 second pause, the interviewee self-selects to make a further upgraded negative assessment of colonial women who she defines as ‘agre:ssive’, whilst the men worked (line 405). Again, there is a lengthy pause (3.2 seconds) with no uptake or conditionally relevant second assessment which again indexes the problematic nature of such a negative assessment of colonial women. Consequently, the silence is interpretable as an instance of (as yet) unstated disagreement (Pomerantz 1984: 65). Faced with a lack of response, the interviewee again upgrades her negative assessment of colonial women who had a perverted exercise of power, which is repeated for emphasis. This assessment is thus even more

upgraded, which is unusual, since, as Pomerantz (1984) shows, speakers usually downgrade their assessment when there is no response. This is again treated as problematic since the interviewer does not provide a response and when he does take a turn, this is to carry out a topic shift which quite abruptly changes the time and place frame to Belgium.

Interestingly, following on this fragment, and after this post-colonial topic has been dealt with, he actually shifts back the topical focus to the last months before the interviewee left the Belgian Congo. This lack of chronology in his questions is fairly atypical for this interview. This thus suggests, together with the interviewer's reluctance to take the floor (lines 404, 406 and 409) and his lack of agreement with or any form of reaction regarding the content of the interviewee's words, that the interviewer is not eager to go into this topic any further.

So, summing up, we observed that the interviewee self-initiated the construction of a negative image of colonial women in this excerpt which is in line with the negative stereotypes that exist in the literature regarding white women in Africa (cf Gartrell 1984; Tiryakian 1993). Interestingly, the interviewer hinted at this stereotype himself in excerpts 3a/b/c, but, as we observed in the analyses of these excerpts, he actively co-constructs a counter to this stereotype as far as colonial life is concerned (as opposed to stereotypes about women). In this fragment however, the interviewee not only self-initiates this topic, but she is also very explicit in her descriptions and evaluations, while not leaving much room for counters or accounts that would soften this vividly constructed image. So in this case, the interviewer's silence and abrupt topic shift in line 410 can be regarded as a way of distancing himself from these words. Taking into account the findings from the preceding excerpts, we argue that rather than being related to the negative typification of women, this is due to the negative image that is constructed of colonial society, of which the interviewer obviously was also a member and which thus implies a threat to his own face as well.

4. Discussion and conclusions

In this article we focused on the negotiation of meaning and the construction of the identity of white women in the Belgian Congo in interviews between former colonial women and an interviewer who was also a former colonial and thus had a vast experience of colonial life. Since our preliminary analyses demonstrated that the interviewer had an essential role in this identity work, we took his role in the discursive negotiation of this identity as a starting point for our analyses. Taking into account Wortham's observation that in order to stabilize an individual's social identification, the interlocutor needs to construct a "parallelism between denotation and enactment" (Wortham 2003: 190; see also Wortham, Mortimer, Lee, et al. White 2011), the identity work that is done by the interviewer can be analysed on two levels, namely the interactional and the denotational.

At an interactional level, we observed that the interviewer blatantly restricted the interviewees' discursive rights more than would typically be expected in the context of a research interview. The questions often projected the role of corroborator of the interviewer's observations upon the interviewees and they often contained assessments, which normatively require a conditionally relevant second assessment (Pomerantz

1984), thus limiting the range of potential answers that the interviewees can come up with. Also, because of the presence of these assessments in the interviewer's questions and the suggestive nature of such evaluatively formulated questions, his contribution to the process of meaning construction in these interviews is significant. Furthermore, self-initiated topics by the interviewee are not ratified (excerpt 4), rather, they are followed by lengthy stretches of silence which implicitly urge the interviewee to close the topic. Finally, we also observed a number of parallels with classroom interaction in which the interviewer assumed the role of the teacher, for example when the interviewer provided the answer after an ambivalent answer by the interviewee (excerpt 3b), when he evaluated the quality of the interviewee's answer (excerpt 3c), or when he explicitly repaired the interviewee's lexical error (excerpt 2). As such, he constructs his epistemic status as knowledgeable and discursively in charge of the interaction. So, in short, on the interactional level, the interviewer attributes quite extensive discursive rights to himself which, in particular, set up a framework in which the interviewees are typically expected to follow the interactional lines that are drawn by the interviewer. For example, this is so when the interaction contains features typical of classroom talk, as well as when assessments are voiced, which project the interviewees into the normative framework of giving second assessments. As such, the interviewer quite explicitly enacts a leading discursive role and, complementarily, projects the role of followers onto the interviewees.

This projected docility on the interactional level is emblematic for the identities that are talked into being on a denotational level. However, matters are more complex here, thus reflecting the intricate interaction between aspects of gender, race and class that has been described as being characteristic of colonial societies (e.g. McClintock 1995: 5-11). Although we primarily focused on the aspect of gender in this article (unlike in e.g. Van De Mierop and Pagnaer 2013), the inextricable link between gender and other phenomena becomes clear. For example, in excerpt 4, the interviewee relates the aggressive behaviour of white women towards their black staff to their class and geographic origin, and in the questions in excerpts 3a and 3c, the interviewer implicitly constructs the link between gender and race, since these negative images of white women in the Belgian Congo are largely based on the presence of, and interaction with, Africans, and more specifically the potentially authoritarian behaviour of these women towards their indigenous staff. However, interestingly, the interviewer goes to great lengths to disentangle this link and construct a separate, gendered identity in these instances. The default gendered identity that is constructed in the course of the interviews, to a large extent by the interviewer, is that of the docile, naïve woman who followed her husband to the Belgian Congo (see excerpts 1 and 2), thus highlighting only the passive aspect of the women's dual active/passive role in colonial society (Stoler 1989). In these cases, this is constructed by both interlocutors as unproblematic, even though this explicit docility is fairly face threatening from a contemporary perspective. Since the interviews took place in the recent past (between 2004 and 2011) and Western master narratives of the role of women in society have changed considerably between the 1950s and now, one could expect to hear a more critical voice of this default construction of the subservient woman or a stronger emphasis on the active contribution of women to colonial society, inspired by contemporary master narratives in which docility is typically more latent, even though their premises still depart from "the false universal of 'man'", which "has for the most part been presupposed as coextensive with humanness itself" (Butler 1988: 523). Since there is no

mitigation of the face threat of projecting a blatantly docile identity upon women in a general sense, the extensive degree of mitigation in the interviewer's turns in excerpts 3a/b/c is striking. First, the questions typically have dispreferred turn shapes as marked by numerous delaying devices such as reformulations, hesitations and the insertion of a pre-delicate, as well as by the oscillation between personal and generic perspectives. Second, the interviewer contributes to answering these questions very actively in these fragments, sometimes even refocusing the question entirely (excerpt 3c) or partially refuting it (excerpt 3b). Third, the interviewer also explicitly positively evaluates the interviewee's response in excerpt 3c, which supports his view that contempt for colonials was only based on the jealousy of non-colonials. This indicates his reluctance to initiate these topics, but, interestingly, his contributions are not mitigations of the face threats to women in general, which could have been expected given the fact that the interviewees are all women and it is hence the other interlocutors' face that is being threatened. Rather, it is quite the contrary, since additional face threats to women are formulated, attributing to them, on a general level, for example the features of being superfluous (excerpt 3b) or unbearably jealous (excerpt 3c). It thus becomes clear that the mitigation is oriented to the colonial scope of the question, thus downplaying the potential deviance of life in the Belgian Congo in comparison with Belgium, or Western society. This is further corroborated by the fact that the interviewer sets up an ingroup/outgroup opposition based on whether or not the individuals were colonials, and, as typical of such a comparative intergroup perspective (Tajfel 1981), he highlights the similarities and qualities of the ingroup as opposed to the negative attributes of the outgroup (e.g. jealousy in excerpt 3c). As such, gender is, even though only very briefly, made irrelevant as a discerning variable for group membership and ingroup solidarity between the colonial men and women is created, for example in excerpt 3c, as they are all presented as the victims of jealousy by the non-colonial Belgians. Thus the colonial/non-colonial opposition is made relevant by the interviewer in the discussion, even briefly overcoming gender as the discerning variable for group membership, in order to prevent face threats to the colonial system in the Belgian Congo. The interviewer's efforts to save the face of this colonial society also explains his reluctance to probe the interviewee's self initiated topic about the aggression of white women towards their black staff any further (excerpt 4), since this would draw additional attention to such a face threatening topic, which would entail face threats to all actors in colonial societies, and hence, also to the interviewer.

When we combine the analytical findings of the denotational and the interactional level, it is quite clear that the interlocutors jointly construct the identity of the docile, even superfluous woman for the interviewees on both levels. The face threatening nature of this construction is hardly negotiated in these excerpts, which is especially marked in comparison to the way the image of colonial society as a whole is the object of extensive negotiation, initiated by the interviewer. Given his own involvement in the colonial system, this is perhaps not so surprising, since a critical attitude towards this system can be considered as a face threat to any former member of this colonial society. Hence, it seems that the interviewer's discursive management of the interview, both in the initiation of topics and in the form of assessments, and in his active contribution to the construction of an acceptable answer, prevents his own face as a former member of colonial society in the Belgian Congo from being threatened on a personal level. So the orientation of the topic (either directed at colonial society or at the

status of women) is quite decisive for how meaning and face threats are negotiated, and this is a perfect reflection of the interviewer's insider (as a former fellow-colonial) / outsider (as a man)-status. On a more general level, the analyses have uncovered the different ways in which the interviewer actively contributed to the construction of a positive image of the Belgian Congo, which is also proven by the noticeable absence of any critical discussion relating to the exploitation of blacks (except for the interviewee's self initiation of this topic in excerpt 4). We argue that the interviewer's avoidance of any criticism of the image of colonial Congo is related to his own personal experience with colonial society, and that this – almost romanticizing – position is also made possible by the broader Belgian context in which the post-colonial debate is not so well-developed as in other countries (Goddeeris 2011), as well as by the even more general context in which 'Congolese' and other histories of former colonized countries, "tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe" (Chakrabarty 1992: 1).

In conclusion, regarding the construction and negotiation of meaning and identity in these interviews, we observed that the interviewer had a crucial role. The linguistic means through which he manages these topics, all the way from topic initiation to topic closure, is decisive for the selection, negotiation, and formulation of the stories that are told and the identities that are jointly talked into being. Consequently, we conclude that far from being a neutral conduit for the voice of the interviewee, the interviewer has an active role in shaping this voice (cf Cicourel 1964), and, as demonstrated in this article, ironically, by policing the acceptability of answers or stories as they emerge, the interviewees can at times be rendered voiceless. As such, this interviewer not only shapes, but really manages, the construction of meaning by highlighting certain aspects, in this case related to women and colonial life, while actively hiding others. We have also shown a number of interactional techniques (such as assessing, evaluating, and taking the third turn) by which the interviewer projects the interviewees into a powerless role on an interactional level and how this actually enacts the master narrative of the patriarchal structure as typical of colonial societies. Thus the wider, societal context with its "historical, sociocultural forces" (De Fina et al. 2006: 7) in the form of master narratives and the local communicative context of the interview encounter in which – in this case especially – the interviewer has a guiding role, are not only inextricably linked, but they mutually feed off one another, shaping and reshaping each other as meaning and identities are constructed and negotiated on a turn-by-turn basis between both parties in the interaction.

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